

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

Diversity of Educational Background in the AVMA Leadership (2013-14)

By Dr. Donald F. Smith
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Many people, including myself, express disappointment in the lack of diversity among the leadership of the AVMA. Not enough women, too few recent graduates, insufficient number of underrepresented minorities. All true. But when it comes to college of graduation, which I would argue is a critical component of diversity, the AVMA is exemplary.

Contrast our profession's educational diversity in the last quarter century with that of the US presidents, vice-presidents, Supreme Court justices, or Federal chairs. I, for one, am grateful that our AVMA leadership is more descriptive of the entire country's educational institutions and not just the monochromatic Ivy and Ivy-clone infrastructure where most of our government's leaders attained their educational experience.

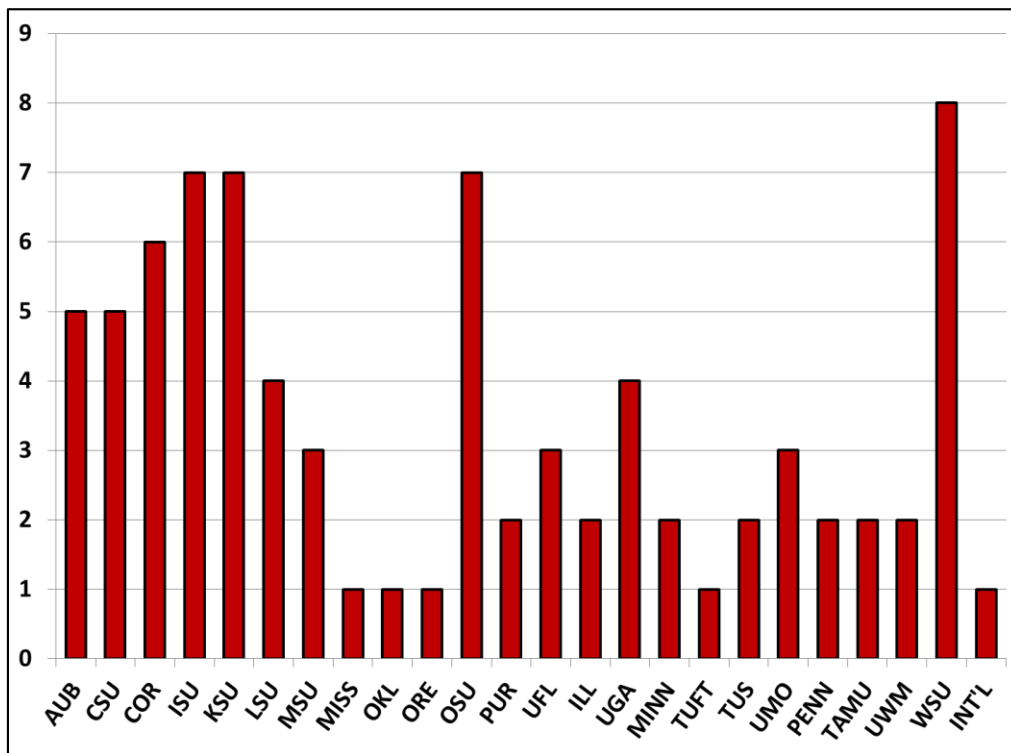


Figure 1. Number of graduates (y-axis) from Colleges and Schools of Veterinary Medicine who are voting members of the AVMA's House of Delegates and Executive Board (2013-14). INTL represents International. US Colleges with no voting members are: NCSU, TENN, UCD, VMR, WES.

To appreciate the breadth of the AVMA leadership background, consider the following chart that shows the distribution of voting members of the current House of Delegates (HOD) and Executive Board (EB) relative to the colleges from which they received their veterinary degrees.

It is not surprising that the legacy colleges and the post WWII land grant colleges represent the majority of the leadership, since the more recently-established colleges have not had as many years to establish abundant numbers of alumni in mid-career or beyond.¹

Louisiana State University (LSU) is a notable exception. A college that didn't graduate its first class until 1977, LSU has four alumni represented in the leadership. A better depiction of the role of the more recently-established colleges in producing leaders is shown in the following graph, which enumerates the number of voting HOD and EB members proportionate to the alumni base of their respective colleges. The number of voting members per 1,000 alumni is depicted on the vertical axis and the college of graduation on the horizontal axis. This demonstrates more clearly that some of the colleges that had their first graduates in the 1970s and 1980s, notably Louisiana State University, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Oregon State University, and the University of Florida, are among the top 15 schools with respect to alumni who have become the most senior leaders in the AVMA.

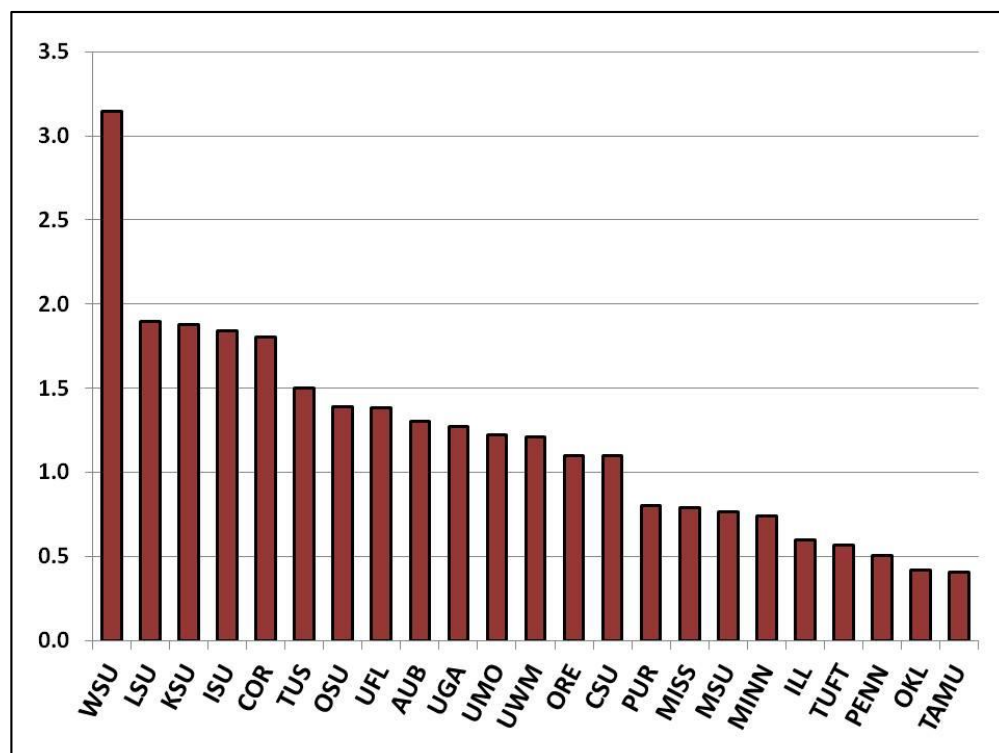


Figure 2. Number of graduates from US Colleges and Schools of Veterinary Medicine per 1,000 alumni who are voting members of the AVMA's House of Delegates or Executive Board (2013-14).

As the veterinary profession continues to work towards a more diverse leadership profile in terms of gender, age, and underrepresented minorities, let us continue to value the strengths already abundant through breadth of educational background. As one of our greatest attributes, it must be preserved.

¹ Refer to the following story for definitions of legacy and other veterinary colleges. Smith, Donald F., Suggested Categories for US Veterinary Colleges. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. August 13, 2013.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Donald F. Smith, Dean Emeritus of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, had a passion for the value of the history of veterinary medicine as a gateway for understanding the present and the future of the profession.

Throughout his many professional roles from professor of surgery, to Department Chair of Clinical Sciences, Associate Dean of Education and of Academic Programs and Dean, he spearheaded changes in curriculum, clinical services, diagnostic services and more. He was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and a member of the National Academy of Practices. Most recently he played a major role in increasing the role of women in veterinary leadership.

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine is one of his projects where he was able to share his vast knowledge of the profession.